

POLITICS

Welsh and Northern Irish not given vote on Repeal Bill

By Cahal Milmo
CHIEF REPORTER

The Government yesterday stopped short of giving an undertaking that it will seek formal consent from the Welsh and Northern Irish assemblies for the key Bill that that will fold EU rules into the law of a post-Brexit Britain – despite saying that the Scottish Parliament will get such a vote.

Scottish Secretary David Mundell said this week that he was working under the assumption that members of the Scottish Parliament would have to give their formal consent to the Great Repeal Bill, which will end the supremacy of European Union law in domestic statute.

The Scottish Secretary added that if consent to the Great Repeal Bill, which will repatriate powers both to Westminster and the devolved governments, were withheld it would have “very serious consequences”.

However, when **i** approached the Welsh Office and the Northern Ireland Office to establish whether consent votes would also be offered in Cardiff and Belfast, the Government declined to say whether it expected the same legislative consent process anticipated in Scotland to apply.

In a statement, the Government said: “We will continue to engage with the devolved administrations ahead of the Bill, to get the maximum possible national consensus on how we

{i} The Scottish Government claimed that **while there may not be a legal case for consulting Holyrood** over Article 50 there is a “clear political obligation” to do so.

go about this. There is an established process for parliamentary legislation in the form of the Sewel Convention. The Bill has not yet been published and its content will determine the process to take it forward.”

The failure of the Government to acknowledge it will have to enter the legislative consent process with the Great Repeal Bill caused raised eyebrows in Wales, where unlike Scotland and Northern Ireland, voters opted for Brexit.

A Welsh Government source said: “There is a question mark over the precise content of the Bill, which it is fair to say we haven’t seen. But it looks extremely likely that it will have to cover areas that are devolved and would thereby require a legislative consent motion.”

DIPLOMACY

Trump accepts invitation to visit from Queen

By Andrew Woodcock

Donald Trump hailed the “special relationship” between Britain and the United States as a beacon for “justice and peace” as he welcomed Theresa May to the White House.

In a joint press conference, the Prime Minister said she had extended an invitation from the Queen for the President to make a state visit to the UK later this year.

Mrs May said: “And in a further sign of that relationship I have today been able to convey Her Majesty the Queen’s hope that President Trump and the First Lady would pay a state visit to the United Kingdom later this year, and I’m delighted that the President has accepted that invitation.”

Details of the state visit have not yet been made available.



Philip Hammond (left) tried to reassure his counterparts Pierre Gramegna (centre), from Luxembourg, and Michel Sapin of France at the EU Council in Brussels yesterday AP



DIPLOMACY

No trade deal with Trump until our EU obligations are finished, says Hammond

By Jon Sharman

Britain will fully abide by European Union rules on trade talks, Chancellor Philip Hammond said yesterday amid concerns about efforts to seek a deal with Donald Trump’s administration.

Officials in Brussels have said it is possible for the UK to hold talks about prospective post-Brexit trade links but not to enter into full-blown negotiations on any deals.

Mr Hammond said that while the UK was still part of the European bloc it would remain a “fully engaged” member and follow rules that state that trade deals are Brussels’ responsibility.

Speaking after a meeting of the European Council’s economic and financial affairs council, he said: “We will continue to abide by the rules, and the regulations and the laws, of the EU for so long as we are members. Of course we want to strengthen our trade ties with the very many trade partners we have around the

world, but we are very mindful of our obligations under the treaty and we will follow them precisely.”

The European Commission’s position on what was allowed in trade talks was restated on Tuesday by its spokesman, Margaritis Schinas (*inset*). “A discussion is where you express what you would like to see as part of a menu. A negotiation is where you start actually negotiating on the menu and ordering the food you want to have,” he said.

Theresa May is expected to trigger the Brexit process in March and the disentanglement from the continent could take two years or more.

During her visit to the US, she told senior Republicans in Philadelphia on Thursday that she was “delighted that the new administration has made a trade agreement between our countries one of its earliest priorities”.

The Prime Minister said she was “looking forward to pursuing talks” about a new UK and US free trade agreement. THE INDEPENDENT



Great Repeal Bill ‘Taking back control’

The Great Repeal Bill was announced in October as the vehicle by which the Government wants to annul existing European Union law and bring it into domestic legislation.

The UK has amassed a vast body of EU rules, covering areas from trade

to farming. Much of it will remain vital to the functioning of the UK economy. But in deciding what stays and what goes, the UK Government will also stray into areas – such as agriculture – which are devolved to Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast.

TURKEY

May glosses over Erdogan’s crackdown to talk trade

By Joe Watts

Theresa May will use a meeting with Turkey’s President today to announce a new joint working group with Ankara to prepare the ground for a formal trade agreement after Brexit, No 10 said last night.

The talks will focus on potential future trading relations, a Downing Street spokeswoman said, despite Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s regime undertaking arrests, media shutdowns and removing officials from key posts.

Mrs May will also use her visit to the Turkish capital to deepen security co-operation, particularly in relation to counter-terrorism and aviation. The Prime Minister is only likely to raise concerns about Turkey’s crackdown on domestic opponents “should they come up” as part of the negotiations.

The No 10 spokeswoman added:

“There are a range of issues, including immigration and the situation in Syria, where it is important to engage with Turkey.” Asked whether the Prime Minister would raise concerns about allegations of oppression in Turkey, the spokeswoman said: “Should they come up, she would state her views on that.”

The joint working group on trade is the 13th that the UK now has with other countries as it looks to cement trade relations with the world after Brexit. Another Downing Street official said the working group would involve “work that goes on between officials to look at liberalising trade, reduce tariffs and pave the way for future trade co-operation”.

Mrs May’s visit comes after Mr Erdogan declared a state of emergency in the wake of last summer’s coup attempt. He ordered

{i} According to Amnesty International, the human rights situation in Turkey has “deteriorated markedly” since the coup, including cases of **excessive use of force by police and ill-treatment of detainees**.

a wave of arrests, the closure of numerous media outlets and the removal of thousands of public officials – including judges, teachers and academics – from their jobs.

The human rights group Amnesty International has said that Ms May’s visit is a “vital opportunity” to raise concerns with the country’s increasingly powerful leader, whom No 10 has characterised as an “important ally”.

THE INDEPENDENT

Patrick Cockburn, page 19

FRANCE

Fillon paid his wife €500,000 for ‘job she didn’t do’

By Liane Winmurst

The French presidential candidate François Fillon is under pressure following claims he paid his wife €500,000 (£430,000) from public funds for a job she didn’t do.

Mr Fillon, one of the top contend-

ers in the presidential election this spring, is facing a preliminary investigation by financial prosecutors into a possible misuse of public funds.

In an uncomfortable exchange on French television, the right-wing nominee said he will step out of the race if formally charged. He claimed

there was nothing improper in his wife’s employment as his parliamentary assistant.

“Her work was real,” said Mr Fillon, adding that his wife corrected his speeches, received “countless” people, represented him at events and summarised the news for him.

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